

# King County Annexation Initiative

The King County Annexation Initiative is a County effort to promote annexation and incorporation of the remaining urban unincorporated areas (that is, areas outside city limits but inside the urban growth area) of King County, consistent with the state Growth Management Act and planning policies enacted over a decade ago by cities and King County government.

Annexation is the process by which an area becomes part of a city. Incorporation is the process of creating a new city. State law gives control over annexation and incorporation decisions to cities and residents of unincorporated areas. The King County Annexation Initiative is directed at providing community outreach and information, as well as financial incentives for cities to take steps to complete annexations or for communities to incorporate. The Initiative is in its second year, and is supported by over \$10 million in County funds for city incentives and outreach. The County is focusing its efforts on the ten largest remaining urban unincorporated areas

(see Table), but is also working to promote transfer of the dozens of much smaller islands of urban service responsibility that have been left behind by annexations and incorporations over the years.

## Goals of the Annexation Initiative

- Preserve the quality of local services to urban communities by transferring governance responsibility to cities, which have more revenue options available for funding urban local services than does the county
- Preserve the quality of county regional and rural local services by providing financial relief to these budgets dependent on general county tax revenues
- Ensure the smooth transition of services from the county to the cities for citizens as well as county employees and departments

-- King County Council Motion No.  
2004-0381, September 2004

Most of the largest unincorporated urban areas have been “claimed” by cities as part of their planned future territory. Annexation rates have slowed in recent years. There are a variety of challenges to implementing annexation plans. The primary challenge is financial: remaining urban unincorporated areas are largely residential in nature. Residential neighborhoods do not generate the sales tax or other revenues typically needed to support urban service levels. Large residential annexations stretch city budgets as more residents must be served without commensurate city revenue increases.

King County is also struggling to preserve service levels to these urban communities. The County has cut over \$100 million from its budgets in the last three years and expects to continue to cut

**King County's 10 Largest Urban Unincorporated Areas as of 2005**

Area	Population (2000)	City with adopted annexation plans for this area
East Federal Way	20,300	Federal Way
East Renton	7,400	Renton
Eastgate	4,600	Bellevue
Fairwood	39,400	Renton
Kent North East/Panther Lake	23,600	Kent
Finn Hill/Juanita/Kingsgate	31,700	Kirkland
Klahanie	11,000	Issaquah
Lea Hill	8,200	Auburn
North Highline/Boulevard Park/White Center	32,400	None ( <i>Seattle and Burien now studying</i> )
West Hill	14,000	None ( <i>Seattle and Renton now studying</i> )

programs every year for the foreseeable future in order to balance its budget. Among the recent cuts have been elimination of recreational programming in parks and community centers and elimination of most new road capacity projects.

Transfer of urban local service responsibility to cities is both consistent with the regional growth management plans and will make it possible for the County to stabilize service levels for the County's regional service responsibilities (public health, juvenile detention and adjudication, superior court, felony prosecution and public defense, elections, property assessment, public records, etc.). Regional growth plans recognize that cities have a greater ability to provide urban local services than does the County, given both the variety of revenue tools available to cities, and given the fact that the tax revenue engines that support urban services—downtown commercial areas—are located in cities.

*Since 1989...*

- 10 new cities have incorporated, moving over 250,000 people into cities
- 70,000 people have annexed into existing cities

*Today...*

- Of King County's nearly 1.8 million residents, over 1.4 million live in cities
- Approximately 136,000 live in rural areas
- Over 218,000 live in urban areas outside of cities—a population equivalent to the second largest city in the state
- Some urban unincorporated communities are very large: the Fairwood/Petrovsky area covers nearly 6900 acres and has over 39,000 residents. Others "islands" are very small—a few acres and a handful of residents.
- There are 62 islands of urban unincorporated area of 100 acres or less

The inefficiency of providing local services to a scattered patchwork of geographically isolated areas is another reason that King County is encouraging annexation of these areas to adjacent cities.

Three independent commissions have recently called for the County to take steps to encourage remaining urban unincorporated areas to become part of cities (King County Budget Advisory Task Force, King County Municipal League, and King County Commission on Governance). County Executive Ron Sims first proposed the initiative as part of the 2003 County budget.

*The Countywide Planning Policies developed jointly by the cities and King County in the early 1990s as required by the state Growth Management Act call for all parts of the urban area to be part of a city no later than 2012. At the rate areas are now annexing to cities, this goal will not be met until the year 2029. Incentives and action to accelerate the pace of annexation are needed: the King County Annexation Initiative responds to this need.*

For additional information, please contact Elissa Benson at 206 296-3414 at the King County Office of Management and Budget.

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